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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 DJIBOUTI 000472

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SUBJECT: DECLARATION OF DROUGHT DISASTER IN DJIBOUTI

1. (U) Several years of continuous drought and the lack of social safety nets have eroded the livelihood and humanitarian conditions for pastoralists in rural Djibouti. On April 11, the Government of Djibouti declared that because of this drought, a humanitarian emergency existed in the southern and northwestern districts of the country. It requested international support to assist the affected populations. The United Nations (UN) subsequently launched a "Flash Appeal" for USD 7.4 million to support emergency food distributions, water provision, health interventions and relief for animals in the emergency areas for a six-month period. The Chief of Mission concurs that an adequate response is beyond the capacity of the Djibouti government and through this disaster declaration, requests USG assistance to support a humanitarian response.

Background

2. (U) Djibouti is a low-income food deficit country (LIFDC) and ranks 154 of 177 on the Human Development Index report of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP). Approximately 75 percent of the population lives in relative poverty and infant mortality is very high at 103 per 1,000 live births. Unemployment is widespread and the country normally fills consumption gaps with large-scale imports and food aid. Djiboutians in the rural areas earn a living through livestock husbandry and follow a primarily nomadic lifestyle. USAID/Djibouti currently provides USD 38 million in Development Assistance and Economic Support Funds (DA and ESF) in developmental programming in the health, education and livestock sectors.

Current Situation

3. (U) The March/April seasonal rains in Djibouti were erratic, which affected pasture regeneration critical to support livestock, the main source of livelihood for pastoralists. Drought has severely compromised the livelihood of pastoralists since 2000. USAID-funded FEWSNET, which tracks local livelihood indicators, note that domestic animals have perished in significant numbers and milk production has declined by 30 percent. The government estimates 100,000 are affected although FEWSNET reported in April that 28,650 people are affected after a quick assessment of some parts of the affected areas. FEWSNET, with other donors and government counterparts, reported in May 2005 that over 47,000 people are affected. FEWSNET, donors and the Government of Djibouti plan a more detailed and formal assessment in order to identify and register the affected population. According to the Government of Djibouti, pastoralists (who comprise approximately 20 percent of the population) have already begun to migrate to the country's capital in increasing numbers in search of support after losing household assets, although no actual record of their numbers exists. Rainfall is not expected to resume until September 2005.

Response

4. (U) The UN's "Flash Appeal" to international donors outlines a six-month intervention to support 28,650 pastoralists through provision of general rations, water delivery/rehabilitation, emergency health assistance, and livestock support. The districts of Tadjourah (Northwest), Dikhil and Ali Sabieh (South-Central) have all been declared as states of emergency by the Government. The USD 7.4 million request is to support World Food Program (WFP), UN Children's Fund (UNICEF), Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and World Health Organization (WHO) projects that will be implemented directly with government counterparts. There are no major international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) with emergency response capability operating in Djibouti.

The exit strategy for the response coincides with the arrival of the September/October rains that should regenerate pasture lands and improve animal conditions and thus the welfare of people in the affected areas.

15. (U) The international response to the Flash appeal has been significant and pledges are still coming. Within the appeal, USD 3.5 million is requested for support to populations and USD 3 million has been pledged. The appeal for general distribution of food is completely funded with Japan (USD 1.5 million) as the major contributor. Complementary contributions have come from Norway, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt. Water delivery and rehabilitation activities are 100 percent funded through a USD 300,000 contribution from the German Government. Emergency health has received contributions totaling USD 50,000, however a gap for legitimate activities of USD 150,000 still remains. The UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) has appealed for USD 3.9 million to provide feed and veterinarian assistance to distressed animals (50,000 head) that has not received a response. The remainder of the appeal still unfunded (USD 250,000) is to support efforts by the Government of Djibouti to develop an internal disaster response capacity (training and capital equipment).

Disaster Declaration

16. (U) As Chief of Mission, I hereby declare that a disaster exists in the districts of Tadjourah, Dikhil and Ali Sabieh in Djibouti caused by the persistence of drought conditions, and request that USG international disaster assistance funding be made available to assist the affected population. The Government of Djibouti is not able to respond adequately to the emergency needs, has asked for, and is willing to accept, international assistance, and it is in the interest of the USG to help. Based on emergency needs, Embassy requests USD 150,000 in DA funds to be given to USAID/Djibouti, which will provide funding to UNICEF (in partnership with WHO). Funding would go towards supplementary feeding, emergency health and immunization programs for 5,800 children, as described in the Flash Appeal that has been e-mailed to OFDA Washington. Both UNICEF and WHO have a successful track record in Djibouti, with respect to management of health activities, and will coordinate with the Djibouti Ministry of Health. Embassy Djibouti will continue to monitor the effects of the drought and the local and donor response to it and provide additional information when available.
RAGSDALE